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ABSTRACT

This report suggests that language study combined with the broad-based study of the history, politics, and culture of other countries, as well as existing international business courses, are essential for first-class preparation of a business person who will operate internationally. The report discusses how to sharpen the focus of internalization so that it can be done effectively at a smaller school whose resources for the project may be limited. The recommended approach is a major or concentration in international business, rather than required international business courses for all business majors. An interdisciplinary approach is built in from the beginning, together with required foreign language proficiency. (Author/JL)

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# INTERNATIONALIZING THE BUSINESS CURRICULUM AT A SMALLER SCHOOL: THE IMPORTANCE OF COLLEAGUES IN LANGUAGE, HISTORY, POLITICAL SCIENCE, AND AREA STUDIES

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# INTERNATIONALIZING THE BUSINESS CURRICULUM AT A SMALLER SCHOOL: THE IMPORTANCE OF COLLEAGUES IN LANGUAGE, HISTORY, POLITICAL SCIENCE, AND AREA STUDIES

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**Abstract.** The thesis is that language study together with broad-based study of other countries' history, politics, and culture, as well as existing "international" courses, are essential for first-class preparation of a business person who will operate internationally. The paper discusses how to sharpen the focus of internationalization so that it can be done effectively at a smaller school whose resources for the project may be limited. The recommended approach is a major or concentration in international business, rather than required IB courses for all business majors. An interdisciplinary approach is built in from the beginning, together with required foreign language proficiency.

In 1974 the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) added a new emphasis to the preamble of its Curriculum Standard:

> "The purpose of the curriculum shall be to provide for a broad education preparing the student for imaginative and responsible citizenship and leadership roles in business and society -- domestic and worldwide...." [1]

In 1980, an "interpretation" was added:

> "There is no intention that any single approach is required to satisfy the worldwide dimension of the Curriculum Standard, but every student should be exposed to the international dimension through one or more elements of the curriculum." [2]

A three-year study commissioned by the AACSB, entitled Management Education and Development: Drift or Thrust into the 21st Century, noted:

> "As is glaringly obvious to any observer (especially American observers) of today's business world, the international aspects of business have grown increasingly crucial in recent years....the international component of the curriculum has received emphasis both from the organization of business schools (i.e. AACSB) and from individual schools. The issue.... is: is there enough emphasis being put on the international area?" [3]

[1] Porter, L.W., and McKibbin, L.E., Management Education and Development: Drift or Thrust into the 21st Century, McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1988, p.59

[2] Ibid. p.59

[3] Ibid. p.66

The authors of the AACSB-commissioned study (published in 1988) answer that question succinctly: as far as they could ascertain, not much has been done. They note that despite increasing the emphasis on international exposure, the AACSB has not yet made it a requirement "backed up by the enforcement power of a specific Standard component."[4] Even more important, they believe, is that schools of business have not yet done much in this area on their own.[5]

The study poses an issue to be addressed by business schools: "How much should they expect their domestic U.S. students -- especially at the M.B.A. level -- to know about the culture, history, geography, economy, and politics of at least one major foreign country or region in addition to their own?"[6]

The authors suggest that the answer should be more, much more, than is currently expected. Porter and McKibbin believe, as does this author, that U.S. business school graduates can ill afford "...to continue to be as parochial -- as culturally and internationally naive -- as they have been in the past."[7]

Indeed, U.S. corporate executives in general are often so parochial and naive that some of them do not see the need for increased international education -- part of the reason why the U.S. does not compete as well internationally as it could.[8] Despite corporate leaders' failure of perception, the President's Commission on Foreign Language and International Studies as long ago as November, 1979, found that "...one of the leading

[4]Ibid. p.319
[5]See also Thanapoulos, J. and Leonard, J., International Business Curricula: A Global Survey, Academy of International Business, 1986; Table 5 reproduced herein as Appendix A
[6]Porter and McKibbin, op. cit., p.320
[7]Ibid., p.320
[8]Ibid., p. 320

reasons behind a declining U.S. international competitive edge was American business' lack of foreign language and area expertise."[9]

Thus it appears that academe must take the lead. And there is a substantial carrot to offer:

> "From a microeconomic perspective, studies have found a correlation between international business education and firm performance." [10]

And Paul Beamish and Jonathan Calof found in their fall, 1989, article, "International Business Education: A Corporate View" that more and more, business executives are beginning to appreciate the importance of international business education:

> "Mr. Costanzo (Vice President of Citibank), in a symposium on 'Preparing Tomorrow's Business Leaders Today,' stated that 'multinational business is becoming so important that the business school had better prepare all its students for it.'" [11]

But, in the words of the Wicked Witch of the West, the question is, how to do it? To date, there appear to be two basic approaches:

(1) introduce an "international perspective" into all or almost all existing business courses, or

(2) develop courses which are specifically and completely "international". [12]

The first approach has the merit of reaching all the business students, as most agree is desirable. It is also inexpensive, necessitating in many cases only changes in textbooks or course materials.

But this first approach is often deceptive: it is difficult to

[9]Beamish, P, and Calof, J., "International Business Education: A Corporate View", J. of Internatl. Bus. Studies, Vol.XX, No. 3, at pp/ 553-554
[10]Ibid., at p.554, citing Beamish(1986,1987), Reynolds (1986), and Koh (1986)
[11]Ibid., at p.554
[12]See Appendix B

ensure that a meaningful international component or perspective actually reaches the students, when in many cases the "international component" will be only a hastily-read extra chapter, discussed by a faculty member with little interest or training in it.

Moreover, the insert-a-chapter or add-a-case approach is not very likely to convey to students either the qualitative differences encountered when one begins to operate internationally, or the importance of the international dimension of the real world of business.

The second approach remedies both of those problems, but it does not ensure that all business students are exposed to the international dimension of business -- something that the AACSB recommends.

Ideally, then, one might hope that a business school could, at the undergraduate level, require all its majors to take an International Business course (using one of the several basic texts now out[13]) and offer an upper level international course in each of the functional and support areas -- international marketing, international finance, international human resource management and cross-cultural management, international production management, international economics, international legal environment, international accounting, and so on.

It will be recognized immediately, however, that those additions represent a sizeable commitment of resources. Many smaller schools will hesitate to plunge into such a commitment, since their student pool, and hence their tuition revenues, are quite limited by demographics for the foreseeable future, and since international business education, while demonstrably beneficial to business' bottom line, is not yet being

[13]For examples, see Appendix C

clamored for by employers of the college's graduates.

Therefore in many, if not most, cases, it will be necessary to start small, and, step by step, develop the international component of the business curriculum until it occupies the prominent place it deserves.

At this point it is important to note that neither of the two usual approaches to internationalizing the curriculum ensures that the student will know enough about the area of the world he or she will be dealing with (or planning for) to be able to put his or her international business knowledge to work in the real world. Knowing how international finance works benefits one's business little, in the real world, if the person is insufficiently informed in the areas of language, history, culture, and politics of that area, and is therefore unable to conduct a successful cross-cultural negotiation. Adler and others make the point that intra-cultural negotiations do not prepare one adequately for inter-cultural negotiations, and that the latter are not likely to go as well as they should unless the people involved have the contextual knowledge which allows them to perceive correctly, and adjust for, the very real differences.[14]

In order to be truly productive, a business person who is to operate or plan internationally must understand the parameters of his or her own ethnocentricism, and must further understand how an ethnocentric corporate manager or negotiator from the "other" culture will be likely to see things.[15]

This means that a truly first-rate international business education will include foreign language training, comparative political science,

[14]Adler, Nancy J., International Dimensions of Organizational Behavior, Kent Publishing Co. 1986

[15]Adler, N. and Graham, J., "Cross-Cultural Interaction: The International Comparison Fallacy?" J. Int. Bus. Studies, Vol.XX, No.3, p.515

history, and other elements of "area studies". And it is this author's thesis that if a business school starts its "internationalizing" small, but with an emphasis on interdisciplinary study from the very beginning, the result will be a higher-quality, more sought-after "product" than the more traditional -- and more expensive -- "ideal" programs.

The first step, then, is to propose an international major or concentration in business or management studies, consisting of, say, four upper level courses: international business, international economics or international finance or international marketing (depending on what is already available), comparative political systems of a particular world area, and history of that area. The latter two courses would be taken in the political science and history departments, respectively. To start with, it is probably advisable to pick one, two, or possibly three geographic areas in which the school already offers the language, the comparative political science course, and the history. If demand is sufficient, ways can be found to add others later.

As a related area requirement, there should be either four semesters of college-level language study or oral and written proficiency examinations.

The virtue of this interdisciplinary, international business major approach is, first of all, that it does not initially require additional faculty lines. If a business school has four majors, adding one makes five, and presumably most of the students will still be "domestic" majors. So probably the school will only have to mount enough sections of the international business course each year to accommodate one-sixth or one-seventh of their junior-year majors.

Many schools already have one or more international electives in one

or more of the specialized areas; one of these can be required for the international business majors. Still, if none currently exists, the creation of one such course involves only a small number of sections each year.

Requiring specific political science and history courses does entail administrative cooperation between schools, divisions, or departments, but in many institutions Humanities or Liberal Arts faculty are glad to cooperate, both because it means more students, and because they agree that it will be beneficial to the country and to the world for business majors to be more broadly educated. And the burden of cooperation is not too heavy here, since one is not talking about inundating other faculties suddenly with large numbers of students, nor is one talking about creating "watered down" "service" courses, which liberal arts faculty are often reluctant to become involved wiht. In most cases, if there are prerequisites, those can be taken by international business majors as part of their general education requirements.

One could also usefully require cultural anthropology of the area; relevant religious studies; perhaps art history, and so on. Some students might in fact add those as general education electives. But most institutions do already offer history and political science courses which are relevant. This paper argues that one should start small and grow gradually, so that students and faculty alike have a chance to ease into the program, and to discover its benefits, while giving administrators time to assess its potential for viable expansion.

Then there is the foreign language issue. Many schools make it optional. But it this author's view that although U.S. corporations may

not presently realize it (perhaps because so few U.S. corporate executives can speak the languages of the countries in which they do business, and therefore don't know what they're missing), foreign language capability will, over time, substantially increase U.S. corporations' ability to compete overseas successfully.

Although it is possible to speak another language without understanding the culture of that country, it is very difficult to take the true measure of a person from another country without speaking his or her language, because the national culture and the individual's own culture are so embedded in his or her language.[16] There are now "European Schools" in several European countries, which take this premise very seriously.[17] From kindergarten to twelfth grade, students take their subjects in three languages -- their native tongue and two others. By 11th grade, the only subjects they take in their native tongue are the language itself, philosophy, and science. Seven other subjects are taken in two or three other languages. If the European Community takes foreign language study so seriously, can we, who hope to do business with them, afford to do nothing?

Therefore, this author argues strongly that foreign language capability should be required, even though it is perhaps the most difficult piece of the proposal to deal with administratively. In the beginning, one must probably accept that one's business majors will be studying what is, in effect, literary French, Spansih, German, or Russian. Moreover, the emphasis will be on reading competency, not speaking ability. If a small business school cannot afford its own language instructors, or if that is curricularly and administratively forbidden, then it is difficult to offer language

[16]A minor in the cultural anthropology of that person's country might enable one to come to a fairly accurate understanding -- but one still would be unable to communicate very effectively with him or her.

[17]The Wall Street Journal, March 6, 1990, p.1

language training which emphasizes speaking ability and which teaches business vocabulary.

Nevertheless, grammar is grammar, and four semesters of traditional "literary" instruction will be a good foundation, especially when one considers that some of the readings offered in those courses will give insight into the history and culture of the countries which speak that language. As discussed above, this is of great value to the international business major, although speaking ability and business vocabulary must somehow be acquired. If one can, down the road, expand one's study abroad program to include business internships, the specialized vocabulary and verbal fluency can be added rapidly at that point.

Also, if one allows students to satisfy the language requirement with oral and written proficiency exams,[18] one makes up for what may perceived as weak language-for-business training capabilities by allowing students to take intensive language training elsewhere. It also encourages students who, due to their backgrounds, are proficient in another language, to consider international business as their major. These students with a built-in second language capability are students we should be seeking out and encouraging. At present they are a hidden, untapped resource.

The next step is to work assiduously to increase the international business majors' visibility in the employment market place and in the pool of MBA applicants. One would become well acquainted with one's career development officers. One would try to get funds to travel to employers who would (whether they know it yet or not) benefit from having employees with this preparation, to meet with them and try to get them to interview some of these majors. One would show them the studies

[18]There will be some expense for examiners, but not nearly what language instructors would cost.

regarding the correlation between international business education and corporate performance in international trade.

One would also travel to graduate schools and explain one's program to sdmissions officers. And one would invite successfully placed alumni and alumnae back to speak to undergraduates, to increase their awareness of the program's potential.

This should, over a few years' time, increase demand for places in the international business major. At that point a case can be made for developing existing faculty "internationally", and for adding faculty, both in the international business area and in the humanities or liberal arts departments offering the area studies courses.

When this begins to happen, there are many different ways a school can choose to go. There are faculty exchanges, student international business internships abroad, additional international business electives, an international business course or sequence for all business majors, foreign language proficiency for all business majors, more areas of area studies, in-house intensive language instruction, geography courses, winter intersessions abroad with multi-national corporations, and so on.

These further options are, however, beyond the scope of this paper. The proud possessors of a burgeoning international business program will not find it excruciatingly difficult to choose one interesting, innovative, well-funded path over another.

## CONCLUSION

The focus here has been to suggest a way in which even a smaller school could put itself on the road toward a high-quality international

business program.

It is recommended that one begin with an international business major or concentration, but that it be interdisciplinary, with required foreign language proficiency, from the very beginning.

It is further recommended that the business faculty and administration take an active part in the placement of the international business majors, since good demand for such students will make it easier to justify increasing faculty and administrative resources for the program.

APPENDIX A

Table 5 from Thanapoulos & Leonard, International Business Curricula; A Global Survey, AIB, 1986

Table 5

THE AACSB SCHOOLS: INTERNATIONALIZATION CONCERNS

The responses to Question 9 of the questionnaire sent to the AACSB schools (see Appendix A) provided interesting insights on what different institutions are doing or thinking. In this part we are presenting the answers received as a percentage of the total. N/A signifies that the information provided was marked as not applicable. Three hundred and eighty-four institutions responded to the questionnaire. The n=, following each question, signifies the number of the institutions that attempted to answer the particular item. The row totals should equal 100 if the percent difference between 384 and n is added.

| # | Question | YES | NO | N/A |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Do you currently have informal agreements(s) with foreign business schools? [n=346] | 31.8 | 57.6 | .8 |
| 2 | Do you currently have an international business internship program? [n=350] | 19.3 | 70.6 | 1.3 |
| 3 | During the past three years, has your college used executives in residence to teach international business courses? [n=351] | 15.6 | 74.7 | 1.0 |
| 4 | In the past three years, has your college used foreign professors (not members of your faculty with foreign citizenship) to teach international business courses? [n=352] | 22.7 | 67.7 | 1.3 |
| 5 | Do you have an academic advisory committee specifically for your international business program? [n=347] | 18.5 | 63.3 | 8.6 |
| 6 | Do you have an advisory committee of business executives specifically for your international business program? [n=349] | 8.6 | 74.8 | 7.6 |
| 7 | Does your school offer on a permanent basis short international business seminars/roundtables? [n=349] | 10.7 | 78.1 | 2.3 |
| 8 | Does your school occasionally offer short international business seminars/ roundtables? [n=344] | 41.4 | 45.3 | 2.9 |

| # | Question | YES | NO | N/A |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 9 | Do you have any specific placement activities for your international business students within your college? [n=346] | 14.3 | 66.7 | 9.1 |
| 10 | Do you monitor the career paths of your international business majors after graduation? [n=340] | 18.0 | 50.0 | 20.6 |
| 11 | In the past three years, did your college attempt to get grants (federal, corporate, etc.) in order to enhance its international business program? [n=344] | 34.4 | 49.5 | 5.7 |
| | Were you succesful? [n=240] | 15.6 | 25.3 | 21.6 |
| 12 | Has your college engaged in any formal dialog with the College of Arts and Sciences (in your institution) in order to enhance the background of your international business majors? [n=350] | 49.2 | 27.3 | 14.6 |

APPENDIX B

Tables from Nehrt, Lee, "The Internationalization of the Curriculum," J. of International Business Studies, Vol. XVIII, No.1, 1987, pp. 93-94.

**TABLE 5**
**Major Variables of the International Business Education and Levels of Study**

| Variable* | Undergraduate Total | Undergraduate Percent | Masters Total | Masters Percent | Doctoral Total | Doctoral Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| INACC | 67 | 20 | 56 | 23 | 6 | 14 |
| INBUS | 176 | 54 | 121 | 49 | 12 | 28 |
| INECO | 201 | 61 | 113 | 46 | 19 | 44 |
| INMAF | 133 | 41 | 113 | 46 | 17 | 40 |
| INMIF | 97 | 30 | 96 | 39 | 11 | 26 |
| INBUL | 36 | 11 | 45 | 18 | 3 | 7 |
| INMAN | 112 | 34 | 108 | 44 | 14 | 33 |
| INMAR | 222 | 68 | 150 | 61 | 16 | 37 |
| MNC'S | 46 | 14 | 54 | 22 | 7 | 16 |
| INOTH | 65 | 20 | 60 | 24 | 10 | 23 |
| MAJIB | 73 | 22 | 72 | 29 | 21 | 49 |
| MINIB | 56 | 17 | 37 | 15 | 16 | 37 |
| MACIB | 29 | 9 | 19 | 8 | 3 | 7 |
| MICIB | 30 | 9 | 20 | 8 | 8 | 19 |
| LAREQ | 73 | 22 | 25 | 10 | 5 | 12 |
| LAREC | 71 | 22 | 33 | 13 | 7 | 16 |
| TOTALS | 328 | 100 | 248 | 100 | 43 | 100 |

*See Table 1 for definitions of variables.

**TABLE 1**
**Variable Definitions**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| MAJIB | = | There is an International Business Major |
| MINIB | = | There is an International Business Minor |
| MACIB | = | There is an International Business Major in conjunction with a functional area |
| MICIB | = | There is an International Business Minor in conjunction with a functional area |
| LAREQ | = | There is a requirement for foreign language(s) |
| LAREC | = | There is a recommendation for foreign language(s) |
| INACC | = | There is an International Accounting course |
| INBUS | = | There is an International Business course |
| INECO | = | There is an International Economics course |
| INMAF | = | There is an International Macro-finance course |
| INMIF | = | There is an International Micro-finance course |
| INBUL | = | There is an International Business Law course |
| INMAN | = | There is an International Management course |
| INMAR | = | There is an International Marketing course |
| MNC'S | = | There is a course on Multinational Corporations |
| INOTH | = | There is another international course, not mentioned above |

## APPENDIX C

### Basic International Business Texts: A Few Examples

1. Ball, Donald, and McCulloch, Jr., Wendell, International Business; Introduction and Essentials, Third Edition, Business Publications, Inc., Plano, Texas, 1988

2. Daniels, John, and Radebaugh, Lee, International Business; Environments and Operations, Fifth Edition, Addison-WEsley Publishing Company, 1989

3. Schnitzer, Martin; Liebrens, Marilyn; and Kubin, Konrad, International Business, South-Western Publishing Co., 1985

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1. Adler, Nancy J., International Dimensions of Organizational Behavior, Kent Publishing Co., 1986

2. Adler, Nancy, and Graham, John, "Cross-Cultural Interaction: The International Comparison Fallacy?" J. of International Business Studies, Vol. XX,.NO.3, p.515

3. Beamish, Paul, and Calof, Jonathan, "International Business Education: A Corporate View," J. of International Business Studies, Vol. XX, No.3, p.553

4. Mapes, Glynn, "Polyglot Students Are Weaned Early Off Mother Tongue," The Wall Street Journal, March 6, 1990, p.1

5. Porter, Lyman, and McKibbin, Lawrence, Management Education and Development: Drift or Thrust into the 21st Century, McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1988

6. Thanapoulos, John, and Leonard, Joseph, International Business Curricula: A Global Survey, Academy of International Business, 1986

## ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

1. Beamish, Paul, "Train for World Business," Policy Options, March 1986

2. Koh, A.C., "An empirical investigation of the export practices of United States firms: The links among organizational structure, export marketing strategy, and export performance." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Alabama, 1986

3. Nehrt, Lee, "The Internationalization of the Curriculum," J. of International Business Studies, Vol. XVIII, No.1, 1987, p.83

4. Reynolds, A.S., "Intercultural training programs conducted for U.S. multinational corporation employees doing business with the People's Republic of China," Unpublished doctoral dissertation, George washington University, 1986

5. Thanapoulos, John, and Vernon, Ivan, "International Business Education in the AACSB Schools," J. of International Business Studies, Vol. XVIII, No.1, 1987, p.91

The present author has not been able to obtain copies of 1,2, and 4 above, but believes they will be of interest to people who can obtain them.